

**HAMILTON COUNTY TAX LEVY REVIEW COMMITTEE
SENIOR SERVICES LEVY SUBCOMMITTEE
138 EAST COURT STREET, ROOM 603
CINCINNATI, OHIO 45202**

April 29, 2021

Hamilton County Board of Commissioners
Commissioner Stephanie Summerow Dumas, President
Commissioner Alicia Reece, Vice-President
Commissioner Denise Driehaus
Re: 2017 Senior Services Levy Midterm Review

Dear Honorable Commissioners:

The Hamilton County Tax Levy Review Committee, under Chair Gwen McFarlin, appointed a subcommittee for a midterm review of the 2017 Senior Services Tax Levy. The subcommittee members are Christie Kuhns, John Silverman and Mark Quarry. Support for the subcommittee was provided by Lisa Webb, Hamilton County Senior Policy Manager.

Background

The Senior Services Levy ("the Levy") has historically provided funding to three agencies:

1. Council on Aging of Southwestern Ohio (COA);
2. the Adult Protective Service of Hamilton County Jobs and Family Services (APS); and,
3. the Veteran's Services Commission (VSC).

In 2017, three new programs were added to the Levy, each receiving \$250,000/year in funding:

1. Medical care for county's homeless senior citizens;
2. Senior medical navigation services; and,
3. In-home health care for seniors (this program was modified to become care for caregivers)

These new programs were developed with initial Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for all three programs released in June 2018 and due in July 2018. Two of the three programs were awarded based on these RFPs. Center for Respite Care began billing through the levy for homeless senior medical care services in February 2019. CareStar, the selected vendor for patient navigation began services in June of 2019, working closely with St Vincent DePaul Charitable Pharmacy to help clients with coordination of medical care. The in-home health care program had no bidders in the initial RFP and was reimaged to be a care-for-caregivers program with a second RFP released in June 2019, but no bidders met the intent of the program. A third more detailed RFP with a focus on training and education services for caregivers; helping to identify barriers to caregiver self-care; and goal setting and with reducing disparities of health risks faced by African American caregivers was released in December 2019 with Center for Closing the Health Gap selected as the vendor. Contract negotiations for this

direct service program were paused due to COVID-19 and the final contract was approved by the Commissioners in March 2021.

The subcommittee's review was predominantly of the COA since it receives a large majority (more than 90%) of the Levy's funding and is Hamilton County's Elderly Services Program (ESP) provider.

In the 2017 Senior Services Levy subcommittee report, Chair Edward B. Herzig noted the COA:

"...provides high quality, cost effective social services for a vulnerable and growing segment of Hamilton County...the goal of the program is to allow the elderly to remain independent and in their homes. The Council on Aging made necessary changes that allowed the program to succeed financially by decreasing the number of clients served and other cost saving measures. The market penetrance is currently 27.3% and if Medicaid and other community services are added, it is 44%. These services allow seniors to remain in their homes, and delay or avoid the cost of nursing home placement. The problem is that the numbers of elderly citizens is rapidly increasing in Hamilton County and there is a real and growing need for these services. Therefore, the amount of financial support necessary to underwrite these programs will continue to grow even with COA's continued restructuring and management efforts. A long-term solution must be found that will allow for more clients to be served while reducing or eliminating reliance upon property taxpayers. The Council on Aging has asked for a significant increase that would increase the levy to \$125 million over the next five years. The subcommittee recognizes that the increase would allow more clients to be served with this increase, but even the requested increase is not sufficient to address the long-term full scope of the problem."

The 2017 subcommittee recommended the COA form a strategic planning committee to review its scope of services that can be reasonably provided to senior citizens, address the growing elderly population and develop plans for increased funding that does not only depend on taxes. Creation of such a committee could benefit the County, COA and our aging population but will require direction and involvement of the County, the TLRC and a wide range of interested community partners.

The 2017 Senior Services Levy was an increase from 1.29 mills to 1.6 mills, an increase of \$10.85 annually per \$100k of valuation. The Levy was approved by 72% of Hamilton County voters.

Comparison: 2017 to Present

Market Penetration

In 2017, COA had a market penetration of 27.3%. By November 2020, market penetration had increased to 32.4%.

Increased Levy Revenue

In 2017, there was a gap between levy funding (\$19.6M) and the county census of 5,797 elderly residents. Passage of the 2017 levy increased 2020 COA funding to \$25.4M although the county census increased to 8,600 elderly residents. Note: This is due to Ohio and Hamilton County's growing population of residents over the age of 60.

Aging Population

Ohio has 2.8 million people over the age of 60, the 6th largest older population in the United States. In 2010, Ohio's population 60+ years of age was 2.3 million. By 2030, the number will increase by 33% to 3.1 million. The fastest growing portion of the population is the 85+ age group. Hamilton County compares with the other 4 counties in the COA service area as shown below.

Characteristics of People Age 65+ in COA Service Area				
County	Households with ≥1 person 65+	Total % of Population	With a Disability	Less than 125% Poverty Level
Butler	22.1%	13%	32.7%	8.1%
Clermont	22.1%	14%	34.6%	10.6%
Clinton	25.2%	13.5%	11.7%	11.1%
Hamilton	23.4%	14.1%	33.4%	14%
Warren	20.9%	12.9%	30.7%	6.4%

COA implemented a new program in 2018 called Fast Track Home, an innovative model that addresses short term needs to serve more seniors at a lower overall per person cost. Fast Track Home provides care for seniors and families when they need it most – upon transition from the hospital or nursing facility. In 2019, its first full year of operation, Fast Track Home represented 8.5% of the clients served at only 2.9% of the cost. Fast Track Home is an example of how COA addressed the long-term financial needs of the program which was a recommendation from the TLRC.

Care Director Implementation

A new database platform, Care Director, was purchased by COA to support the Elderly Services Program and Fast Track Home. Implemented in October 2018, it is an integrated care management and claims reimbursement system that utilizes customizable assessment tools and reporting in a modern web platform and works in remote environments such as hospitals and in homes.

COVID-19 Pandemic

Older adults were hit especially hard and COA began planning its response in January 2020. COA issued its emergency response plan on March 12, 2020.

Throughout the pandemic, COA served individuals already enrolled in programs and services, as well as community members who had not previously needed help. COA was awarded \$3.3M in CARES Act Funding that allowed COA the ability and flexibility to meet growing community need during the time of crisis. The CARES Act funding will play a vital role in helping COA to continue to meet this community need, while continuing to offer the traditional home and community-based services to thousands of individuals in the region.

COA's COVID-19 response and relief efforts can be categorized in (4) Focus Areas.

1. Food Security

COA worked to ensure Hamilton County seniors had access to food.

- Distributed two rounds of Emergency Food Boxes - nearly 7,295 boxes in Hamilton County - to older adults already enrolled in home-delivered meals and those who previously attended congregate programs.
- Enrolled 595 additional older adults into home-delivered meals.
- Partnered with six area restaurants including LaRosa's, Frisch's and small, minority owned restaurants to deliver more than 12,000 "comfort" meals to older adults in low-income senior apartment buildings.
- Provided emergency meals and other supplies to Mt. Healthy-area older adults impacted by weather-related power outages.
- Launched the federal Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, enrolling 607 low-income older adults in Hamilton County.

2. Personal Care Supplies

COA partnered with several charitable, volunteer efforts to gather and distribute essential supplies to seniors in need.

- Partnered with Frame USA to collect cash donations and items including toilet paper, cleaning supplies and personal care items at sites across the region.
- Partnered with Crossroads Church on April 4 donation drive, collecting 27 pallets of supplies.
- Partnered with Hamilton County Emergency Management Agency to procure personal care, PPE and household supplies for county seniors.
- Sorted and repackaged all supplies for distribution to 635 Hamilton County seniors.

3. Protecting Essential Workers

COA worked with its provider network to provide safe, effective home and community-based services to older adults in need.

- Worked with staff, provider network, funders and local health departments to adopt policies and procedures so programs and services could be delivered in a safe and effective manner.
- Worked closely with county Emergency Management Agencies and the Ohio Department of Aging to secure and distribute thousands of items of PPE to the provider network. Items distributed include face masks and shields, gloves, disinfecting cleaner, hand sanitizer, infrared thermometers and gowns.
- Maintained open channels of communication with the provider network, including town hall meetings with home care assistance meals providers.

4. Older Adult Health, Wellness and Safety

Despite the suspension of face-to-face visits in March 2020, COA staff maintained contact with clients and caregivers, developing initiatives to help protect and support older adults.

- By April 3, COA staff contacted all 5,163 Hamilton County Elderly Services Program clients to ensure their needs were met. The outreach encompassed 10,400 calls.
- Distributed education kits and masks to 5,800 older adults living in 107 senior buildings in Hamilton County. This was part of COA's leadership and work on the Congregate Living Steering Committee, a subcommittee of Governor Mike DeWine's Multi-Agency Coalition.
- Implemented a volunteer-driven Adopt a Senior program, connecting weekly with 145 Hamilton County residents not enrolled in COA programs. Services provided included: support signing up for Click List and similar shopping services, regular friendly check ins, and help obtaining personal care supplies.
- Worked to address social isolation by converting community-based health and wellness workshops (Healthy U) to virtual and telephonic formats.

- Through a regular COVID-19 e-newsletter and other outreach, provided education to older adults and caregivers regarding timely topics including frauds and scams, mental health resources and U.S. Census.

Future Needs and Issues

COA identified several areas that will impact its ability in the future.

Aging Population

As previously highlighted, the Senior Services Levy funding has enabled COA to increase its market penetration and provide services to a greater number of elderly residents. However, projections for the number of elderly residents needing care in the future will increase.

- Rapidly Aging Population
By 2035, there will be more people age 65+ than people age 18 and younger.
- Additional Issues
1/3 of people age 65+ have at least one disability; 1 in 5 households includes someone age 65+.
- Caregivers in Short Supply
Families are smaller and more spread out. Adult children have many responsibilities to juggle, including work and child-rearing.
- Long-term Care
7 out of 10 people will need some form of long-term care during their life.
- Residential Preference
Most people, 9 out of 10, prefer to stay in their homes as they age. (AARP)

Transportation

Since transportation will continue to impact its ability deliver services, COA's goals relative to transportation are: (1) Development of coordinated, efficient and on-demand access to service; (2) Hands-on assistance and escort based on senior needs; and (3) Vehicles that can accommodate wheelchairs, stretchers, and other assistive devices.

COA recently was awarded a competitive \$470,000 Federal Transit Authority Grant.

Home Care Workforce Shortage

- 12% of referrals are not picked up due to inadequate workforce.
- Live Well Collaborative project.
- Home Care provider recruitment.
- Referral batching.

Social Isolation

Summary/Conclusion

Because the charge of our subcommittee was a midterm review of the Senior Services Levy, we did not engage a consultant in our analysis. Also, since COA is largely the primary recipient of the Senior Services Levy funding, we did not conduct a thorough analysis of the other agencies receiving funding.

Adult Protective Services (APS): Mandated by Ohio Revised Code, APS of Hamilton County Job and Family Services investigates reports of abuse, neglect and exploitation of adults age 60 or older. APS receives majority its funding from the Senior Services Levy. In the 2017 Senior Services Levy TLRC report, Health Management Associates provided a positive report about the administration, provision of services and finances of APS but did recommend *“One possible improvement might be to track whether and where individuals who have cases opened at APS receive other services from various levy programs. This might provide the opportunity to assess whether a reallocation of these funds could produce better outcomes for the individuals served.”*

Veteran’s Services Commission (VSC): Also mandated by Ohio Revised Code, the VSC provides emergency financial support to veterans age 65 or older, their dependents and families, and older active-duty military or their dependents who are residents of Hamilton County. In the 2017 Senior Services Levy TLRC report, HMA reviewed VSC finances and found them to be in order.

The three new programs receiving Senior Services Levy funding, (1) Center for Respite Care; (2) CareStar; and (3) Center for Closing the Health Gap were not reviewed by our subcommittee as these programs are still in their initial years of services but it is recommended that a review of the programs to date be included in the next full TLRC report and consultant analysis for the Levy.

Our subcommittee concludes the Hamilton County Elderly Services Program is an effective, quality program carrying out the mission of providing services for our vulnerable and rapidly growing elderly residents. Council on Aging helps these residents maintain their independence and remain in their homes if prudent.

As our county begins the transition out of the COVID-19 pandemic, Council on Aging is again helping seniors. Recent news stories have highlighted how COA is assisting elderly Hamilton County as they obtain COVID-19 vaccinations.

“Organization Helping Senior Citizens Get Vaccinated”

(<https://www.fox19.com/2021/02/11/organization-helping-senior-citizens-get-vaccinated/>).

Although funding has increased for this program with passage of the current levy cycle, the growing elderly population projections for Hamilton County and Ohio warrants planning and consideration for its next appearance on the 2023 ballot.

It is our opinion that the ESP, largely carried out by COA, is financially sound and provides high quality services to the residents of Hamilton County. It is also advisable to consider some of the recommendations from the 2017 Senior Services Levy report, including but not limited to:

- Formation of a strategic planning committee to review the scope of services that can reasonably be provided to our senior citizens and needed to address the growing population;
- Develop plans for increased funding that does not only depend on taxes.
- Presentation of the new strategic plan to the community through an educational campaign for a long-term solution to the financial needs and that could ultimately reduce the tax burden on the citizens of Hamilton County but also provide for a more robust program in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this midterm review of the Senior Services Levy. We are happy to provide any additional information and answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

2021 Senior Services Levy Subcommittee

Mark Quarry, Chair

Christie Kuhns

John Silverman